THE VERY BEST OF

GRIEG

NAXOS

2 CDs

EDVARD GRIEG (1843-1907)

HIS LIFE

Edvard Grieg is the most important Norwegian composer of the later 19th century, a period of growing national consciousness. As a child, he was encouraged by the violinist Ole Bull, a friend of his parents, and studied at the Leipzig Conservatory at his suggestion. After a period at home in Norway he moved to Copenhagen and it was there that he met the young composer Rikard Nordraak, an enthusiastic champion of Norwegian music and a decisive influence on him. Grieg's own performances of Norwegian music, often with his wife, the singer Nina Hagerup, established him as a leading figure in the music of his own country, bringing subsequent collaboration in the theatre with Bjørnson and with Ibsen. He continued to divide his time between composition and activity in the concert-hall until his death in 1907.

HIS MUSIC

Stage Works

Grieg collaborated with the dramatist Bjørnson in the play *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, for which he provided incidental music, and still more notably with Ibsen in *Peer Gynt*. The original music for the latter makes use of solo voices, chorus and orchestra, but is most often heard in orchestral form in the two suites arranged by the composer. These include *Morning, Aase's Death, Anitra's Dance* and *In the Hall of the Mountain King* in the first suite, and *Ceremonial March, Arabian Dance, Peer Gynt's Homecoming* and *Solveig's Song* in the second, the order not corresponding to the sequence of events in Ibsen's remarkable play.

Orchestral Music

In addition to the two *Peer Gynt* Suites and three pieces from *Sigurd Jorsalfar*, Grieg wrote one of the most famous of all romantic piano concertos, completed in 1868. The *Holberg Suite*, for string orchestra, celebrates the Scandinavian Molière, the Norwegian playwright Ludvig Holberg, an almost exact contemporary of J.S. Bach and Handel. The two *Elegiac Melodies* of 1881 are also for strings only, with other arrangements of piano music, and the *Lyric Suite*, based on four piano pieces of 1891, was orchestrated in 1904.

Chamber Music

Grieg's three violin sonatas remain a part of standard romantic repertoire, revealing his mastery of harmonic colour in the clearest of textures. The third of these, in C minor, was completed in 1887 and is particularly striking.

Piano Music

As a pianist himself, Grieg wrote extensively for the piano, excelling, in particular, in his ten volumes of *Lyric Pieces*, and in other sets of short compositions for the instrument, often derived directly or indirectly from Norwegian folk-music.

MUSIC NOTES

From Holberg's Time, Suite in Olden Style, Op. 40 *I. Preludium* **(CD 1, track 1)**
Originally written for piano during the summer of 1884, Grieg's *From Holberg's Time: Suite in the Olden Style* is an early example of pastiche, of romantic neo-classicism, its five movements consciously parodying the keyboard styles and dance-suite forms of Holberg's seventeenth century. The string arrangement was made by Grieg in 1885.

Lyric Pieces, Book 1, Op. 12 *No. 1. Arietta* **(CD 1, track 2)**
Grieg published some ten collections of *Lyric Pieces* for piano during his career, the first volume in 1867 and the last in 1901. These delicate miniatures offer vignettes of Grieg's particular abilities as a composer, his subtle handling of harmonic colour and winning gift of melody. The first album of *Lyric Pieces* was published in 1867 and contains eight pieces written between 1864 and 1867. These works have an unreserved charm and freshness, which have made them some of his most popular piano pieces.

Violin Sonata No. 3 in C minor, Op. 45 *I. Allegro molto ed appassionato* **(CD 1, track 3)**
Grieg's *Violin Sonata No. 3* was completed in 1867, when Grieg was at the height of his fame.

Peer Gynt, Op. 23 *Solveig's Song* **(CD 1, track 4)**
'Solveig's Song', from Act IV of *Peer Gynt*, offers a brief glimpse of the girl, now a middle-aged woman, who sits waiting for Peer Gynt in the far North.

Lyric Pieces, Book 3, Op. 43 *No. 4. Little Bird* **(CD 1, track 5)**
The third volume of *Lyric Pieces* appeared in 1877 and is one of the most significant of the albums.

In this collection Grieg has created piano pieces of an unusually high and consistent quality, as well as a unity of content which one does not find in the previous volumes. In No. 1, *Butterflies* (CD 2, track 6) in No. 4, *Little Bird* and No. 6*, To the Spring* (CD 2, track 8)*,* playfulness and happiness are dominant.

Peer Gynt Suite No. 1, Op. 46 *I. Morning; III. Anitra's Dance; IV. In the Hall of the Mountain King* **(CD 1, tracks 6, 7, 8)**
Among the best known music that Grieg wrote was his incidental music for Ibsen's remarkable play *Peer Gynt*, first performed in Christiania in 1876. Suite No.1 opens with the famous *Morning*, music that seems reminiscent of the Norwegian fiddle, with its characteristic tuning. In the drama the piece serves as an introduction to Act IV, set on the south-western coast of Morocco. *Anitra's Dance*, in the fourth act, welcomes Peer Gynt in his Arab robes. The final excerpt in the suite is from Act II, *In the Hall of the Mountain King,* set in the mountains of Norway, the land of Trolls and of the Old Man of the Dovre, whose daughter Peer Gynt courts and whose kingdom he covets.

String Quartet No. 1 in G minor, Op. 27 *II. Romanze: Andantino - Allegro agitato* **(CD 1, track 9)**
The first performance was given in Cologne by the Heckmann Quartet in October 1878. The quartet rapidly won popularity, meeting the approval of Liszt, who heard it at Wiesbaden.

Two Elegiac Pieces, Op. 34 *No. 1. Heart Wounds; No. 2. Last Spring* **(CD 1, tracks 10-11)**
The *Two Elegiac Pieces* are derived from other compositions. Arranged for string orchestra in 1881, they have their origin in two of a set of songs published in the same year. As always they demonstrate Grieg's command of harmonic colour and the freshness of his inspiration.

Lyric Pieces, Book 5, Op. 54 *No. 3. March of the Trolls* **(CD 1, track 12)**
In Book 5 of the *Lyric Pieces,* from 1891, Grieg reached a quality which he would never surpass, when we consider the individual collections as a whole. While nature's moods appear to be the main theme of Book 3 (CD 1, track 5), in this album the focus of attention is Norwegian peasant life and nature and the development of impressions from nature.

6 Songs, Op. 25 *No. 2. A Swan* **(CD 1, track 13)**
En svane (A Swan) was written in 1876, the year of the first performance of *Peer Gynt.* Grieg arranged this for orchestra in 1895.

Lyric Pieces, Book 2, Op. 38 *No. 1. Berceuse* **(CD 1, track 14)**
Many parts of the ten books of *Lyric Pieces* have been arranged for other performers. The *Berceuse,* taken from the second book, is here arranged for violin and piano.

Two Melodies, Op. 53 *No. 1. Norwegian; No. 2. The First Meeting* **(CD 1, tracks 15-16)**
The *Two Melodies* were arranged by Grieg for string orchestra in 1891 from two earlier songs.

Three Orchestral Pieces from Sigurd Jorsalfar, Op. 56 *III. Homage March* **(CD 1, track 17)**
The incidental music for Bjørnson's play *Sigurd Jorsalfar* was completed in 1872. The three orchestral pieces that Grieg extracted from the five of the original score end with the *Homage March*.

Lyric Pieces, Book 8, Op. 65 *No. 6. Wedding Day at Troldhaugen* **(CD 2, track 1)**
Many of the works in the *Lyric Pieces* collection, although written initially for piano, were also turned into orchestral works by Grieg. *Wedding Day at Troldhaugen* is taken from Book 8 of the *Lyric Pieces*.

5 Songs, Op. 60 *No. 3. On the Water* **(CD 2, track 2)**
The *5 Songs, Op.* 60, set the poetry of Vilhelm Krag, and are highly regarded among his songs. Number 3, *On the Water,* is a good example of Grieg's inspired treatment of Krag's neo-romantic poetry.

Cello Sonata in A minor, Op. 36 *I. Allegro agitato* **(CD 2, track 3)**
Composed in three movements, the *Cello Sonata* is one of the most-played Romantic sonatas for the instrument. The first movement explores an unusually wide expressive range and is heightened by the unusual inclusion of a short solo for the cellist.

Lyric Pieces, Book 5, Op. 54 *No. 4. Notturno* **(CD 2, track 4)**
The *Lyric Pieces, Book 5, were* written in 1891 and consist of five short piano pieces characteristic of Grieg's handling of harmonic and orchestral colour, using melodies and rhythms of clearly Norwegian origin.

Peer Gynt Suite No. 2, Op. 55 *I. Ingrid's Lament* **(CD 2, track 5)**
Peer Gynt Suite No.2 opens with *Ingrid's Lament*, the introduction to Act II, set on a high narrow mountain-track, where Peer Gynt has taken Ingrid, a bride that he has abducted from her wedding and now plans to betray.

Lyric Pieces, Book 3, Op. 43 *No. 1. Butterfly* **(CD 2, track 6)**
See note for CD1, track 5

Violin Sonata No. 2 in G major, Op. 13 *III. Allegro animato* **(CD 2, track 7)**
Thematic unity characterises the *Violin Sonata in G major*, Op. 13, and shows most clearly Grieg's ever-increasing interest in, and identification with, Norwegian folk-music.

Lyric Pieces, Book 3, Op. 43 *No. 6. To the Spring* **(CD 2, track 8)**
See note for CD1, track 5

Symphonic Dances, Op. 64 *I. Allegro moderato e marcato* **(CD 2, track 9)**
Grieg had great respect for Johan Svendsen's *Norwegian Rhapsodie*s from the 1870s, where folk-melodies had been orchestrated for symphonic concert performances. Grieg completed his *Symphonic Dances*, Op. 64, in 1898, and Svendsen himself conducted the first performance.

Lyric Pieces, Book 9, Op. 68 *No. 5. Cradle Song* **(CD 2, track 10)**
Orchestrated from the *Lyric Pieces* piano set, the Cradle Song comes from Book 9.

Melodies of the Heart, Op. 5 *No. 3. I Love But Thee* **(CD 2, track 11)**
Grieg's *Jeg elsker dig* (I Love But Thee), is a setting of a poem by Hans Christian Andersen, here arranged for violin and orchestra.

Lyric Pieces, Book 7, Op. 62 *No. 4. Brooklet* **(CD 2, track 12)**
Brooklet, from Book 7 of the *Lyric Pieces,* brings a particularly lyrical focus to the collection.

6 Songs, Op. 48 *No. 5. A Dream* **(CD 2, track 13)**
In the collection *Six Songs, Op.* 48, settings of German poets, Grieg turns away from the Nordic song and towards the German *Lied*, without departing from a more or less strophic treatment of the poems.

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 17 *I. Allegro moderato* **(CD 2, track 14)**
The frequently performed, recorded, and discussed *Piano Concerto in A minor*, Op. 16 from 1868, has a distinct element of wildness. The overwhelming opening kettledrum roll followed by the cascading chimes on the piano is followed by inspired melodies, many based on Norwegian folk tunes.

For more of the world of Grieg, please try these recordings:

Orchestral Music

Peer Gynt / Lyric Pieces / Sigurd Jorsalfar 8.550864
Grieg: Orchestral Music 8.554050
Grieg: Piano Concerto / Symphonic Dances / In Autumn 8.557279
Grieg / Sibelius: Romantic Music for Strings 8.550330
Scandinavian String Music 8.553106

Chamber Music

Complete Violin Sonatas 8.550417
Cello Sonata 8.550878
Complete String Quartets 8.550879

Lyric Pieces and other Keyboard Works

Lyric Pieces, Books 1-4 ..... 8.553394
Lyric Pieces, Books 5-7 ..... 8.553395
Lyric Pieces, Books 8-10 ..... 8.553396
Holberg Suite 8.550884
Piano Sonata 8.550881
Pictures from Everyday Life / Ballade 8.550883

Vocal Music

Songs Op. 48 / Four Songs / Others 8.553781

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CD1

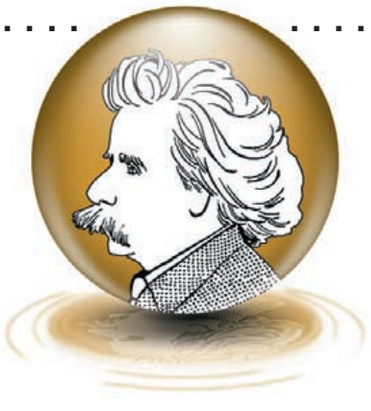
1. **Holberg Suite, Op. 40** I. Preludium 2:51
2. **Lyric Pieces, Book 1, Op. 12** No. 1 Arietta 1:22
3. **Violin Sonata No. 3 in C minor, Op. 45** I. Allegro molto ed appassionato 8:58
4. **Peer Gynt, Op. 23** Solveig's Song 4:38
5. **Lyric Pieces, Book 3, Op. 43** No. 4 Little Bird . . 1:46
6. **Peer Gynt Suite No. 1, Op. 46** I. Morning 3:55
7. **Peer Gynt Suite No. 1, Op. 46** III. Anitra's Dance 3:35
8. **Peer Gynt Suite No. 1, Op. 46** IV. In the Hall of the Mountain King 2:36
9. **String Quartet No. 1 in G minor, Op. 27** II. Romanze: Andantino – Allegro agitato 7:09
10. **Two Elegiac Pieces, Op. 34** No. 1 Heart Wounds 2:35
11. **Two Elegiac Pieces, Op. 34** No. 2 Last Spring . . 4:16
12. **Lyric Pieces, Book 5, Op. 54** No. 3 March of the Trolls 2:59
13. **6 Songs, Op. 25** No. 2 A Swan 2:24
14. **Lyric Pieces, Book 2, Op. 38** No. 1 Berceuse . . 2:17
15. **Two Melodies, Op. 53** No. 1 Norwegian 3:17
16. **Two Melodies, Op. 53** No. 2 The First Meeting . 3:55
17. **Three Orchestral Pieces from Sigurd Jorsalfar, Op. 56** III. Homage March 11:07

Total Timing 70:44

CD2

1. **Lyric Pieces, Book 8, Op. 65** No. 6 Wedding Day at Troldhaugen 5:58
2. **5 Songs, Op. 60** No. 3 On the Water 2:17
3. **Cello Sonata in A minor, Op. 36** I. Allegro agitato 9:24
4. **Lyric Pieces, Book 5, Op. 54** No. 4 Notturno . . 4:31
5. **Peer Gynt Suite No. 2, Op. 55** I. Ingrid's Lament 3:58
6. **Lyric Pieces, Book 3, Op. 43** No. I Butterfly . . . 1:52
7. **Violin Sonata No. 2 in G major, Op. 13** III. Allegro animato 5:24
8. **Lyric Pieces, Book 3, Op. 43** No. 6 To the Spring 2:51
9. **Symphonic Dances, Op. 64** I. Allegro moderato e marcato 7:28
10. **Lyric Pieces, Book 9, Op. 68** No. 5 Cradle Song 4:35
11. **Melodies of the Heart, Op. 5** No. 3 I Love But Thee 1:37
12. **Lyric Pieces, Book 7, Op. 62** No. 4 Brooklet . . . 1:37
13. **6 Songs, Op.48** No. 5 A Dream 2:13
14. **Piano Concerto in A minor, Op.17** I. Allegro moderato 12:54

Total Timing 67:37



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THE VERY BEST OF GRIEG

"What charm, what inimitable and rich musical imagery! … What interest, novelty, and independence!"

(Tchaikovsky on Grieg)

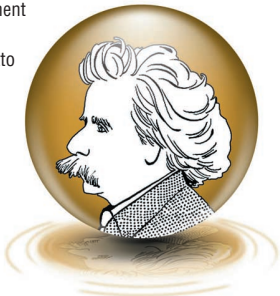
The leading Scandinavian composer of his time and the principal advocate for Norwegian music, Grieg came to the forefront of international attention through works such as his Piano Concerto and his incidental music for *Peer Gynt*. This 2-CD set includes excerpts from the most frequently performed and recorded works of Grieg, including his songs, orchestral music, and instrumental music.

Compact Disc 1

1 **Holberg Suite** Preludium 2 **Lyric Pieces, Book 1** Arietta 3 **Violin Sonata No. 3** Allegro molto ed appassionato 4 **Peer Gynt** Solveig's Song 5 **Lyric Pieces, Book 3** Little Bird 6–8 **Peer Gynt Suite No. 1** Morning • Anitra's Dance • In the Hall of the Mountain King 9 **String Quartet No. 1** Romanze: Andantino–Allegro agitato 10–11 **Two Elegiac Pieces** Heart Wounds • Last Spring 12 **Lyric Pieces, Book 5** March of the Trolls 13 **6 Songs, Op. 25** A Swan 14 **Lyric Pieces, Book 2** Berceuse 15–16 **Two Melodies** Norwegian • The First Meeting 17 **Three Orchestral Pieces from Sigurd Jorsalfar** Homage March

Compact Disc 2

1 **Lyric Pieces, Book 8** Wedding Day at Troldhaugen 2 **5 Songs, Op. 60** On the Water 3 **Cello Sonata in A minor** Allegro agitato 4 **Lyric Pieces, Book 5** Notturno 5 **Peer Gynt Suite No. 2** Ingrid's Lament 6 **Lyric Pieces, Book 3** Butterfly 7 **Violin Sonata No. 2 in G major** Allegro animato 8 **Lyric Pieces, Book 3** To the Spring 9 **Symphonic Dances** Allegro moderato e marcato 10 **Lyric Pieces, Book 9** Cradle Song 11 **Melodies of the Heart** I Love But Thee 12 **Lyric Pieces, Book 7** Brooklet 13 **6 Songs, Op.48** A Dream 14 **Piano Concerto in A minor** Allegro moderato



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